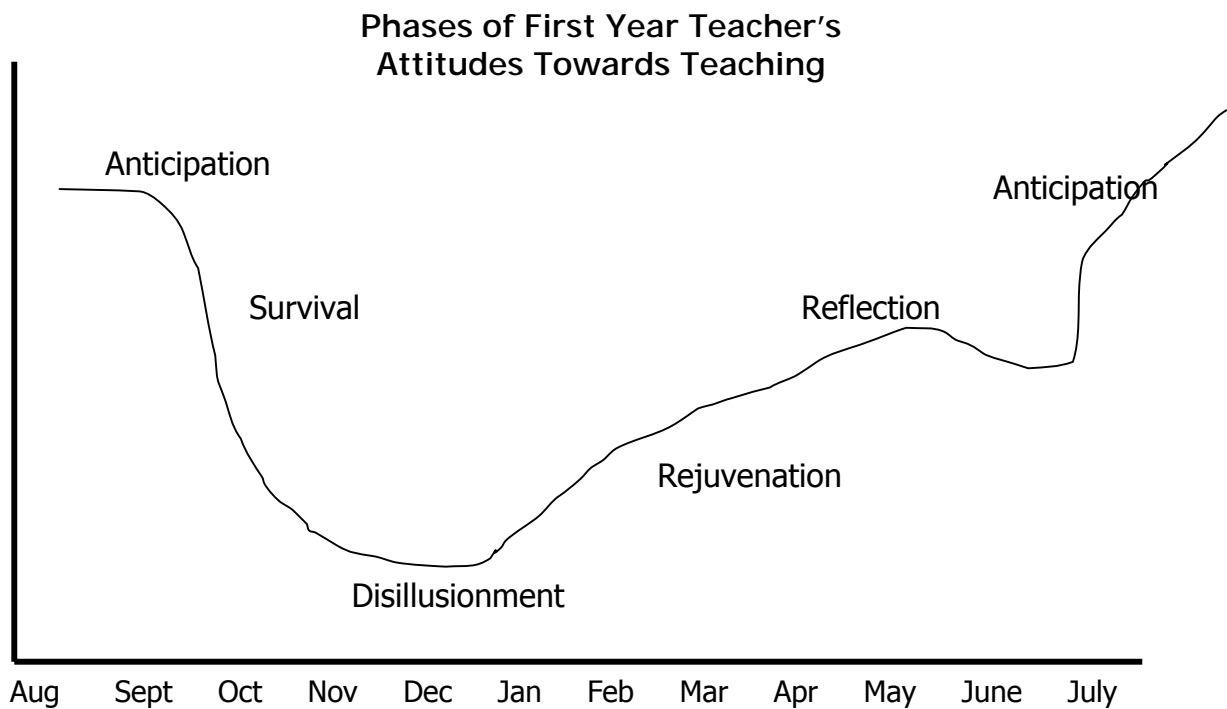


Phases of New Teacher Growth

First year teaching presents a difficult challenge for the novice. Equally challenging is the task of finding out what assistance new teachers need and when they need it. Moir (1990) and her colleagues, in their observations of new teacher growth and development, have defined the phases teachers move through the first year. While not every teacher moves through this exact sequence in these predicted periods of time, understanding these phases can be helpful to those who wish to provide help and support to new teachers. It can define what kind of help is needed at a particular point in the new teacher's development. The work of Moir and her colleagues on new teacher phases is summarized in the following discussion. It should be noted that these phases are defined in relation to the traditional school year. These stages may look different and will impose additional challenges to the offering of services to new teachers on a year round calendar.



Anticipation Phase

The anticipation phase begins during the student teaching portion of pre-service preparation. The close student teachers get to completing their assignment, the more excited and anxious they become about their first teaching positions. They tend to romanticize the role of the teacher and the position. New teachers enter with a tremendous commitment to making a difference and a somewhat idealistic view of how to accomplish their goals. This feeling of excitement carries new teachers into the first few weeks of school.

I was elated to get the job but terrified about going from the simulated experience of student teaching to being the person completely in charge.

Survival Phase

The first month of school is very overwhelming for new teachers. They are learning a lot and at a very rapid pace. New teachers are instantly bombarded with a variety of problems and situations they had not anticipated. Despite increased field experiences and required courses in teacher preparation programs, new teachers are caught off guard by the realities of teaching.

I thought I'd be busy, like when I was student teaching, but this is crazy. I'm feeling like I'm constantly running. It's hard to focus on other aspects of my life.

During the survival phase most new teachers are struggling to keep their head above water. They become very focused and consumed with the day-to-day routine of teaching. There is little time to stop and reflect on their experiences. New teachers spend up to seventy hours a week on schoolwork. Particularly overwhelming is the constant need to develop curriculum. Veteran teachers routinely recycle excellent lessons and units from the past. The new teacher, still uncertain of what will really work, must develop much of this for the first time. Even depending on unfamiliar prepared curriculum such as textbooks is enormously time consuming.

I thought there would be more time to get everything done. It's like working three jobs: 7:00 – 2:30, 2:30 – 6 with more time spent in the evening and on weekends.

Although tired and surprised by the amount of work, first-year teachers usually maintain a tremendous amount of energy and commitment during the survival phase.

Disillusionment Phase

After six to eight weeks of non-stop work, new teachers enter the disillusionment phases. The intensity and length of the phase varies among new teachers. The extensive times commitment, the realization that things are probably not going as smoothly as they want, and low morale contribute to this period of disenchantment. New teachers begin questioning both their commitment and their competence. Many new teachers become physically ill during this phase from the added stress and insufficient sleep.

Compounding an already difficult situation is the fact that new teachers are confronted with several new events during this time frame. They are faced with back-to-school night, parent conferences, completing report cards for the first time, and their first formal evaluation by the site administrator. Each of these important milestones places an already vulnerable individual in a very stressful situation.

At this point, the accumulated stress of the first-year teacher coupled with months of excessive time allotted to teaching often strains relationships with family members and friends. This is a very difficult and challenging phase for new entrants into the profession. They express self-doubt, have lower self-esteem, and question their professional commitment. In fact, getting through this phase may be the toughest challenge they face as a new teacher.

I thought I'd be focusing more on curriculum and less on classroom management and discipline. I'm stressed because I have some very problematic students who are low academically, and I think about them every second my eyes are open.

Rejuvenation

The rejuvenation phase is characterized by a slow rise in the new teachers' attitude toward teaching. It generally begins in January. Having a winter break makes a tremendous difference for new teachers. It allows them to resume a more normal lifestyle with plenty of rest, food, exercise and time for family and friends. This vacation is the first opportunity that new teachers have for organizing materials and planning curriculum. It is a time for them to sort

through materials that have accumulated and prepare new ones. This breath of fresh air gives novice teachers a broader perspective with renewed hope. They seem ready to put past problems behind them. A better understanding of the system, an acceptance of the realities of teaching, and a sense of accomplishment helps to rejuvenate new teachers. Through their experiences in the first half of the year, beginning teachers gain new coping strategies and skills to prevent, reduce, or manage many problems they are likely to encounter in the second half of the year. Many feel a great sense of relief that they've made it through the first half of the year. During this phase, new teachers focus on curriculum development, long-term planning, and teaching strategies. The rejuvenation phase tends to last into spring with many ups and downs along the way. Toward the end of this phase, new teachers begin to raise concerns about whether they can get everything done prior to the end of school. They also wonder how their students will do on the tests, questioning once again their own effectiveness as a teacher.

I'm fearful of these big tests. Can you be fired if your kids do poorly? I don't know enough about them to know what I haven't taught, and I'm sure it's a lot.

Reflection

The reflection phase, beginning in May, is a particularly invigorating time for first-year teachers. Reflecting over the year with other new teachers, support teachers, or by themselves, they highlight events that were successful and those that were not. They think about the various changes that they plan to make the following year in management, curriculum, and teaching strategies. The end is in sight, and they have almost made it; but more importantly, a vision emerges as to what their second year will look like which brings them to a new phase of anticipation.

It is critical that we assist new teachers and ease the transition from student teacher to full-time professional. Recognizing the phases new teachers experience gives us a framework within which we can begin to design support programs to make the first year of teaching a more positive experience for our new colleagues.

From *A Guide to Prepare Support Providers for Work with Beginning Teachers*. Developed by Ellen Moir, University of California, Santa Cruz and Sue Garmston, California Department of Education, 4/92. Adapted from work developed by: Dr. Kendyll Stansbury, Far West Laboratory; Dr. Betty Ward, Southwest Regional Laboratory; Dr. Mary Diez, Alverno College.